

Message Text

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SUBJECT: REACTION TO STATEMENT BY LUIS CARLOS PRESTES CONCERNING
ROLE OF COMMUNIST PARTY IN 74 BRAZILIAN ELECTION

SUMMARY: THE STATEMENTS BY LUIS CARLOS PRESTES, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE BRAZILIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, IN WHICH HE EMPHASIZED THE DECISIVE ROLE PLAYED BY PCB MEMBERS IN THE NOVEMBER 74 ELECTIONS BEFORE THE RECENT CONGRESS OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY, DREW A FLURRY OF SKEPTICAL COMMENTARY FROM THE LEADING POLITICAL FIGURES OF BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION PARTIES. PRESTES' CLAIMS APPARENTLY DESIGNED PRIMARILY TO ENHANCE THE IMAGE OF THE FADING PCB, MAY WELL HAVE THE EFFECT OF STRENGTHENING THE HAND OF THE SECURITY APPARATUS AT A TIME WHEN THE PRESIDENT IS TRYING TO KEEP THEM UNDER CLOSER CONTROL. END SUMMARY.

1. LUIS CARLOS PRESTES, LONG EXILED SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE BRAZILIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCB), IN A CLOSING ADDRESS BEFORE THE XXII CONGRESS OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY DECLARED THAT THE VOTES OF PCB MEMBERS PLAYED A DECISIVE ROLE IN THE ELECTORAL VICTORY OF NOVEMBER 1974 OF THE OPPOSITION MDB. PRESTES CLAIMED THAT IN MAY 1974 HE URGED HIS

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FOLLOWERS TO USE THE VOTE TO HASTEN THE DEFEAT OF THE

MILITARY DICTATORSHIP. THAT ELECTION, HE ASSERTED, WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT BRAZILIAN POLITICAL EVENT SINCE THE '64 REVOLUTION, DEMONSTRATING THE GROWTH OF THE POLITICAL LEVEL OF THE BRAZILIAN MASSES AND CORRESPONDING TO THE INTENSIFICATION OF REPRESSION AGAINST THE PCB.

2. PRESTES' STATEMENTS, WIDELY DISSEMINATED IN THE BRAZILIAN PRESS, DREW A HOST OF COMMENTS FROM LEADING POLITICAL FIGURES OF BOTH THE GOVERNMENT ARENA PARTY AND THE MDB. MDB PRESIDENT ULISSES GUIMARAES ISSUED A STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE PARTY WHICH DID NOT FLATLY REPUDIATE THE PRESTES ASSERTION THAT THE '74 VICTORY WAS DUE TO PCB AID BUT REAFFIRMED THE DEMOCRATIC BASIS OF THE MDB AND ITS ECUMENICAL POLITICAL GOALS. IF COMMUNISTS VOTED FOR MDB CANDIDATES, GUIMARAES AFFIRMED, THIS DID NOT INVOLVE ANY COMPROMISE.

3. SENATE PRESIDENT AND PROMINENT ARENA LEADER MAGALHAES PINTO COMMENTED THAT PRESTES HAS BEEN TOO LONG OUTSIDE OF BRAZIL TO KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON. PRESTES' ONLY GOAL, HE BELIEVED, WAS TO INCREASE THE STANDING OF THE PCB. THE MDB PROGRAM AND ELECTORAL CONTEST IN 1974 WERE WELL FORMULATED, ORGANIZED AND EXECUTED, THE FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER SAID IN DISCOUNTING ANY PCB CLAIMS TO INFLUENCE IN THE OPPOSITION PLATFORM.

4. THE GENERAL RESPONSE BY BOTH GOVERNMENT PARTY AND OPPOSITION POLITICAL FIGURES TO PRESTES' CLAIMS WAS DISBELIEF THAT ANY ALLIANCE EXISTED BETWEEN THE PCB AND MDB OR THAT THE PCB WAS ABLE TO INFLUENCE THE DRAWING UP OF THE MDB PLATFORM. MDB SENATOR AMARAL PEIXOTO OBSERVED THAT VERY FEW MEN IN PUBLIC LIFE IN BRAZIL CAN SAY THAT THEY DID NOT RECEIVE HELP, DIRECT OR INDIRECT, FROM THE COMMUNIST PARTY THROUGH THE VOTES OF COMMUNISTS. ONE MDB FEDERAL DEPUTY COMMENTED THAT SINCE BRAZILIANS WERE OBLIGATED TO VOTE BY LAW HE COULD NOT IMAGINE PCB VOTERS CASTING THEIR BALLOTS FOR ARENA.

5. LAUDO NATEL, EX-GOVERNOR OF SAO PAULO, NOTED THAT ALTHOUGH COMMUNISTS NO DOUBT GAVE AID TO CERTAIN CANDIDATES, HE DID NOT BELIEVE THIS HAD INFLUENCED THE OVERALL RESULTS IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE LAST ELECTIONS. THE VIEW THAT THE COMMUNISTS WERE A MINORITY FACTION IN THE ELECTORATE WITH POSSIBLY THE STRENGTH TO ELECT A FEW PEOPLE BUT NOT HEAVILY INFLUENCE THE FINAL RESULT WAS ECHOED BY OTHER POLITICOS. JOSE BONIFACIO, MAJORITY (ARENA) LEADER IN THE FEDERAL CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, DISCOUNTED THE IDEA OF MDB-PCB ALLIANCE BUT BELIEVED MDB DEPUTIES WITH "LEFTIST TENDENCIES" UTILIZED THE COMMUNISTS TO WIN. JOSE FARIA LIMA, THE YOUNG ARENA

FEDERAL DEPUTY FROM SAO PAULO, SAW THE (74 ELECTION RESULTS AS A PUBLIC MANIFESTATION OF THE GENERAL DISCONTENT WITH THE ECONOMIC SITUATION AT THE TIME BUT NEVER THE OUTCOME OF ANY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ELECTORATE BY THE PCB.

6. ARCH-CONSERVATIVE ARENA SENATOR DINARTE MARIZ WAS THE ONLY POLITICIAN TO GIVE PUBLIC CREDENCE TO THE PRESTES' DECLARATIONS, DECLARING THEY "CONFIRMED EXACTLY WHAT I SAID IN MY SPEECH IN THE FEDERAL SENATE AND WHAT I HEARD OF THE MDB LEADERS". MARIZ HAS RECENTLY, AS IN THE PAST, BEEN SPEAKING OUT ON ALLEGED COMMUNIST INFILTRATION WITHIN THE MDB, AND POINTED TO THE SLOGANS USED BY THE MDB DURING THE ELECTION AS ALL HAVING A COMMUNISTIC BASIS. O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO REPORTED THE EXISTENCE OF "COMPROMISING DOCUMENTS," SOME EVEN SIGNED, THAT ESTABLISHED AGREEMENTS BETWEEN CANDIDATES FOR ELECTIVE OFFICE AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY. THE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CITED AS THE SOURCE OF THIS INFORMATION FOR THE REASON ACCEPTED THE PRESTES' STATEMENTS AS "TRUE IN ESSENCE."

COMMENT:

7. PRESTES' STATEMENTS AS TO THE DECISIVE ROLE OF THE PCB IN THE NOVEMBER 1974 ELECTIONS ARE PATENTLY A DREAM OF GRANDEUR, MOST PROBABLY DESIGNED TO PORTRAY THE PCB AND HIMSELF TO OTHER COMMUNIST PARTIES AS A SERIOUS FORCE IN INTERNAL BRAZILIAN POLITICS. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT CERTAIN CANDIDATES RECEIVED AID AND ELECTORAL SUPPORT FROM THE PDB BOTH WITTINGLY AND UNWITTINGLY. YET THE STERN MEASURES EXERCISED AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS SINCE 1964 HAS SO FRAGMENTED AND EMASCULATED THE ORGANIZATION THAT IT IS NO LONGER CAPABLE, IF IT EVER WAS, OF THE FEATS ASCRIBED TO IT BY THE VENERABLE PRESTES.

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8. PRESTES' ALLEGATION COMES AT A TIME WHEN SEVERAL BRAZILIAN POLITICIANS HAVE BEEN UNDER SUSPICION FOR COMMUNIST TIES IN THE FALL-OUT FROM THE DISCOVERY OF A CLANDESTINE PRINTING OPERATION WHICH ALLEGEDLY WAS INVOLVED INTER ALIA IN SUPPORTING SELECTED POLITICAL CANDIDATES. SEVERAL OF THE MORE RADICAL MDB CONGRESSMEN WERE SINGLED OUT AS BEING WITTING BENEFICIARIES OF AID DURING THEIR CAMPAIGNS. THE PRESTES' STATEMENTS CAN NOW BE UTILIZED AS PROOF POSITIVE THAT THE HAND OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY WAS INDEED EVIDENT IN ELECTING AT LEAST SEVERAL MDB DEPUTIES. THIS ONLY PROVIDES AMMUNITION FOR THE SECURITY FORCES AT A TIME WHEN PRESIDENT GEISEL IS SEEKING TO BRING THEM TO HEEL AND CONTROL THEIR UNTRAMMELED FREEDOM OF ACTION IN THE SUPPRESSION OF SUBVERSIVES. PRESTES IS AN AGING VOICE FROM THE PAST BUT A MAN WHO MANY DEVOTED BRAZILIAN ANTI-COMMUNISTS SEE AS THE BRAZILIAN LENIN WHOSE ONLY GOAL IS THE DESTRUCTION

OF BRAZILIAN SOCIETY.

9. THE POLITICOS HAVE REMAINED SURPRISINGLY UNANIMOUS IN DISCOUNTING THE PRESTES CLAIMS, A NUMBER SEEING IT AS A PCB MOVE TO BLOCK THE EVOLUTION OF MDB INTO A VIABLE, MODERATE OPPOSITION FORCE. RATHER THAN EXPLIT THE OPENING OFFERED BY CASTING THE MDB BEYOND THE PALE AS A TOOL OF THE PCB, ARENA LEADERS SEEM TO HAVE DECIDED THAT A WHOLESALE ASSAULT ON THE OPPOSITION PARTY MIGHT ONLY SERVE TO FORTIFY AND STRENGTHEN THE MDB IN THIS ELECTION YEAR. THEY MAY ALSO FEAR THAT IF THE DECLARATIONS WERE TO SERVE AS A PRETEXT FOR A SERIES OF CASSATIONS, EVEN IF ONLY OF MDB CONGRESSMEN, THE RESULT WOULD BE PREJUDICIAL TO THE OVERALL POLITICAL PROCESS. THE PRINCIPAL POINTS, HOWEVER, IN THIS AS IN OTHER OCCASIONS, ARE (1) WHETHER MILITARY LEADERS ARE MOVED TO PRESS THE PRESIDENT FOR ACTION OF SOME SORT, AND (2) IF SO, HOW HE REACTS. END COMMENT.
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